



PROJECT MUSE®

A Religious Approach to the Zhongyong: With a Focus on Western Translators and Korean Confucians

Seonhee Kim, MinJeong Baek

Journal of Korean Religions, Volume 6, Number 2, October 2015, pp. 27-60
(Article)

Published by University of Hawai'i Press
DOI: [10.1353/jkr.2015.0015](https://doi.org/10.1353/jkr.2015.0015)



➔ For additional information about this article

<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/602101>

A Religious Approach to the *Zhongyong*: With a Focus on Western Translators and Korean Confucians

Seonhee Kim and MinJeong Baek

Abstract

One of most speculative and philosophical works of the Confucian classics, the *Zhongyong* (Kor. *Chungyong*) is also the one demonstrating religiousness. Reading the text in terms of religiousness can be one channel toward understanding its worldview and significance. The present study first analyzes the attempts of Western translators who approached the *Zhongyong* from a religious perspective before proceeding to review religious interpretations of the *Zhongyong* by certain Korean Confucians. While the former focuses on James Legge, Tu Wei-Ming, and David L. Hall and Roger T. Ames, who approached the *Zhongyong* in terms of Western theories and ideas, the latter deals with Yun Hyu, Yi Pyök, and Chöng Yagyong, Chosön dynasty scholars, writing in the 17th, 18th, and early 19th centuries, who interpreted the text differently from other Korean scholars of their time. Despite their different approaches, interpretations of the *Zhongyong* by the Western scholars treated here share a commonality in that they all draw religiousness from the text, focusing the ontological structure with a transcendental being at its center and human emergence and transcendence within it. Their religious interpretations of the *Zhongyong* are supported in a limited way by a certain trend among Korean Confucians. Despite their emphasis on a personal *Shangdi* (Kor. *Sangje*) rather than impersonal *li* (Kor. *li*), Yun Hyu, Yi Pyök, and Chöng Yagyong focused not on a transcendental being or the ontological structure of the world, but on a personal connection with the original source of morality and ethical praxis, drawing from this the notion of self-transformation in everyday life.

Keywords: *Zhongyong*, *Doctrine of the Mean*, James Legge, Tu Wei-Ming, David L. Hall, Roger T. Ames, Yun Hyu, Yi Pyök, Chöng Yagyong, Tian, Heaven, Shangdi

Seonhee Kim received her PhD in philosophy and is currently a research professor in the Humanities Korea Project, Ewha Womans University, Korea.

Correspondence: stilliny@gmail.com

MinJeong Baek received her PhD in philosophy and is a professor in the Department of Philosophy, Catholic University, Korea.

Correspondence: bearphilo@hanmail.net

* This work was supported by the National Research Foundation of Korea Grant funded by the Korean Government (NRF-2007-361-AL0015)

Introduction

The *Zhongyong* 中庸 (Kor. *Chungyong*; *Doctrine of the Mean*),¹ one of the four essential canons of Confucianism, earns its importance by addressing the metaphysical question of the relationship between Heaven and humans. It was by Jesuit missionaries that the *Zhongyong* was first translated into Latin and introduced to Europe in the early seventeenth century.² Beginning with Matteo Ricci, who believed that it was possible to find belief in anthropomorphic deities in ancient Chinese classics, Jesuit missionaries gave a religious coloring to the *Zhongyong*. Such a tendency continued into the twentieth century.

From the Jesuits who first translated the *Zhongyong* to James Legge, a twentieth-century British Sinologist who established the foundation of contemporary Sinology by translating the Four Books, including the *Zhongyong* and other Chinese classics, and then to Tu Wei-Ming 杜維明, a contemporary American scholar of Chinese philosophy—all of these translators and scholars read a certain kind of religious nature into the *Zhongyong*. Such an interpretation was different from Confucianism's traditional approaches or evaluations of this text, as intellectuals in China and Korea had never divided their intellectual traditions and discourses into categories of "philosophy" and "religion."

A religious reading of the *Zhongyong* constitutes one way of approaching the intellectual traditions of East Asia. It allows us to access the rich and complex philosophical reservoir of the ancient world of East Asia, which did not distinguish between religion and philosophy. When viewed from such a perspective, "religiousness" might be not so much the essential nature of the *Zhongyong* as the interpretative perspective adopted by the researchers dealing with that text. However, many researchers acknowledge that Confucianism includes important "religiousness" in that it stresses both a system of moral beliefs and the process of reaching self-transcendence (salvation) through the praxis of those beliefs. The perspective of religiousness provides a junction that makes possible rich interpretations of Confucianism and, moreover, communication with other contemporary academic disciplines.

The *Zhongyong* that has been acknowledged as one of most speculative and philosophical of the numerous Confucian classics is also the one that demon-

strates religiousness. Therefore, reading the *Zhongyong* from the religious point of view is an attempt to understand the worldview and significance of the *Zhongyong* with religiousness as one channel of approach. This paper will first analyze the diverse attempts by Western translators to approach the *Zhongyong* from a religious point of view, and then proceed to review the understandings of the several Korean Confucians who have interpreted the work from a religious perspective. If the former analysis, which focuses on the work of James Legge, Tu Wei-Ming, and David L. Hall and Roger T. Ames, is a study of an outside perspective on the tradition of the *Zhongyong*, the latter, focusing on the work of Yun Hyu, Yi Pyök, and Chöng Yagyong can be regarded as a review on an inside perspective.

Although the translations of Legge, Tu, and Hall and Ames have no correlation between them, they have a common feature in that they describe a sort of religiosity in the *Zhongyong* while they attempt to understand the main notions of the *Zhongyong* by using a Western worldview and concepts. The tendencies of Western translators may function as a mirror reflecting the ways of Confucian scholars from the Chosön dynasty, who took on religious attitudes towards the notions of *Tian* 天 (Kor. *Ch'ön*) and *Shangdi* 上帝 (Kor. *Sangje*) in the *Zhongyong* and used them as a way of self-cultivation. What's more, comparing the former interpretive tradition—a Western and modern perspective—with the latter—a traditional Confucian approach—will demonstrate their distinctive features more clearly, and effectively reveal a Confucian religiosity that focused not on a transcendent being but on personal transformation.

Western Translators' Religious Approach to the *Zhongyong*

James Legge: Through Christian Theology

A missionary, Sinologist, and the first professor of Sinology, James Legge (1815–1897) is renowned as an English translator of the Four Books (Legge 1960). As a Protestant missionary in China, Legge translated Chinese classics into English by using diverse commentaries. He began to translate the Four

Books and the Five Classics (五經) in 1861 and, as a Sinologist who had authored a variety of academic papers and books in the field, upon his return to the United Kingdom from China in 1876, served as a professor of Sinology at the University of Oxford.³

Legge's interpretation of the *Zhongyong* is characterized by his translation of the key concepts of the text from a Christian perspective. He claimed that *Di* 帝 (Kor. *Che*) and *Shangdi* 上帝 (Kor. *Sangje*) found in ancient Chinese classics referred to none other than the "true God" of Christianity⁴:

All the members of the Conference will not agree with me, when I repeat here my well-known conviction, that the *Ti* and *Shang-ti* of the Chinese classics is [*sic*] God—our God—the true God. (Legge 1877, 3)

Provocative from the perspective of Christianity, this argument stemmed from the debates waged between British and American Protestant missionaries who had advanced into China in the nineteenth century regarding the translation of Biblical terminology. Missionaries from the two countries argued about the "terms question," especially the translation of *Theos*, or the name of God, mentioned in Matthew 1:23, clashing over whether to choose *Shangdi* or *shen* 神. Walter H. Medhurst of the London Missionary Society, who argued for *Shangdi* as the translation of *Theos*, claimed that monotheistic philosophy existed in China and that the *Shangdi* described in the Confucian classics was in an analogous relationship with "God" (Medhurst 1847). On the other hand, William J. Boone, the Bishop of Shanghai of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States of America, claimed that "God" had to be translated as *shen*, a generic term, because Chinese people were polytheistic or pantheistic and without a monotheistic philosophy (Boone 1848).

Having translated *Theos* as *Shangdi*, Legge argued that there existed among the Chinese a concept akin to that of the Creator in the Bible. He claimed that the Chinese classics included not only discussions on moral nature and the social duties of humans, but also a concept of God and the religious worship of spirits:

I conceive therefore that I have to do, as my special theme, with the religious [*sic*] and moral teachings in the Confucian books in relation to Christianity; and I will digest what it seems necessary for me to say under three heads; first, what the books contain about God and other objects of religious worship; secondly, what they contain about man and his nature, and about a future state; thirdly, what they contain about the moral and social duties of man. (Legge 1877, 3)

Such ideas of Legge derived from the sixteenth-century Jesuit missionary Matteo Ricci.⁵ In his *The True Meaning of the Lord of Heaven* (*Tianzhu shiyi* 天主實義), Ricci had translated the Christian “God” into Chinese as *Tianzhu* and explained it as *Shangdi* (Ricci 1985, ch. 1). He translated the *Deus* of Christianity as *Shangdi*, the Sovereign on High in Chinese Confucian classics.⁶ Repeatedly quoting passages from Chinese classics that could be interpreted as the religious worship of *Shangdi*, Ricci had laid the image of the Christian God over the uniquely Chinese concepts of *Tian* and *Shangdi*. In his view, although the concept of *Shangdi* as a personal and uniquely singular deity had existed in ancient China, it had been distorted into an impersonal principle or atheistic philosophy, such as that of *Taiji* 太極, in the process of Neo-Confucianization. Ricci’s translation had become a contributing factor in the subsequent Chinese rites controversy and been ultimately replaced with other concepts, such as *Tianzhu*, by papal order, thus disappearing from Christian contexts.⁷

The name of the Christian God as proposed by the Jesuits, *Shangdi* re-emerged in the terms question among nineteenth-century Protestant missionaries. Legge considered *Shangdi* to be the Christian God because “*Shang-Te* [Shangdi] is self-existent. He existed before the heavens and the Earth and men. He created these. He rules over them” (Legge 1852, 32). In the same context, Legge translated *Tian* as the Christian “Heaven” (Legge 1877, 3).

Likewise, Legge’s interpretation of the *Zhongyong* was made from the same perspective. Thus, he translates the first chapter of the text:

What Heaven has conferred is called the NATURE, an accordance with this nature is called THE PATH of duty; the regulation of path is called INSTRUCTION. (Legge 1960, 383)

Regarding this translation, Legge adds the following note:

What is taught seems to be this: To man belongs a moral nature, conferred on him by Heaven or God, by which he is constituted a law to himself. But as he is prone to deviate from the path in which, according to his nature, he should go, wise and good men—sages—have appeared, to explain and regulate this, helping all by their instructions to walk in it. (Legge 1960, 383–384)

By translating *Tian* as “Heaven” and *Shangdi* as “God,” Legge colored the *Zhongyong* with the theological image of humans striving to reach God. Since that time, the *Zhongyong*, to Western readers, has been a religious document bearing humans’ hopes for self-examination and salvation with respect to a transcendent God.

Another characteristic of Legge’s interpretation of the *Zhongyong* is that he imbued the text with an Aristotelian coloring. Such a tendency is apparent from his translation of the title of the work. In explicating the meaning of the *Zhongyong*, Zhu Xi had presented the following definition: “*Zhong* is being neither biased nor slanted, being neither excessive nor deficient, and *yong* is always being thus.”⁸ In the title *Zhongyong* 中庸, Zhu Xi defines *yong* as *pingchang* 平常, something akin to the English “constancy,” “consistency,” or “ordinariness.” For Zhu Xi, then, *yong* was a concept and a word that demonstrated the fact that the starting point for humans’ self-transformation was ordinary everyday life.

Legge translated the title *Zhongyong* as the *Doctrine of the Mean*, a translation that grasps the *zhong* of *zhongyong* as “central” or “median” and is a rendition that borrows the Aristotelian notion of “mean” (*mesotēs*). Combining the Christian concept of God and the Aristotelian concept of the mean, Legge’s translation of the *Zhongyong* may have been familiar to Western thinkers but is limited in capturing the unique characteristics of Chinese philosophy. Although Legge discovered the religiousness of the *Zhongyong* from a Christian perspective in following Ricci’s footsteps, this was not only opposed by many Christians of his day, but was also criticized by contemporary scholars as a

translation that merely Westernized Chinese philosophy.⁹ Attempts to discover the Christian God in Confucianism may more often than not make Confucianism appear as a mere imitation of Christianity.

David L. Hall and Roger T. Ames: the Focus and Field Model

Representative critics of Legge's translation of the *Zhongyong* are Hall and Ames, who also are contemporary translators of the same text.¹⁰ Hall and Ames have criticized Legge's translation as ultimately based on the Aristotelian language of substance and through which it is difficult to grasp the characteristics of Chinese philosophy. From the early years of their research, these scholars have consistently argued that Chinese philosophy, which stresses events or activities, emphasizes the ontology of events whereas Western philosophy, which aims at a transcendent world, uses a language of substance such as "essential nature" and "substantial being" even in understanding the self and, in the end, has developed an ontology of substance (Hall and Ames 1987, 15–16). Ames and Hall think that with a substance-centered language defined by discreteness, objectivity, and permanence, it is difficult to describe the world-view of Chinese philosophy, which is characterized by continuity, processes, and becoming (Ames and Hall 2001, 6).

What Ames and Hall have proposed as an alternative for translating the *Zhongyong* is the focus-field model. According to this, the *Zhongyong* consists of the "language of focus and field." The rendition of the title of the *Zhongyong* likewise has been changed from the same perspective. These scholars see *zhong* as "focus" or "equilibrium" and have derived "focus" from it. They also see *yong* as the "familiar" or "affairs of the day" and have derived "field" from it. According to the focus-field model, the world can be grasped not as a stable and fixed reality but as a flow or a process. What these scholars have stressed as a characteristic of Chinese philosophy distinct from Western philosophy is the idea of a fluid world, as opposed to the world of fixed substances. This fluid world consists of the processes and events experienced by humans who participate in that world:¹¹

The language of focus and field expresses a world always in a state of flux, a world in which items cannot be fixed as finally this or that, but must be seen as always transitory states passing into other, correlative, states. There is no final whole we call “Cosmos” or “World.” The world is an interactive field. It is *wanwu* (萬物)—“the ten thousand things.” (Ames and Hall 2001, 11)

When seen from such a perspective, the *Zhongyong* can be evaluated as a document that clearly describes the self-transformative process of humans participating in the world instead of a substantial world in which deities and humans form relations. The human process of self-transformation has prompted Ames and Hall, who oppose Legge’s Christian interpretation of the text, to introduce into the *Zhongyong* a level of religiousness different from that of that earlier scholar. Although they criticize the Christianization of the *Zhongyong*, these two researchers do not deny the religiousness of Confucianism itself. Like other interpreters of the text, Ames has acknowledged the religiousness of the *Zhongyong*. He and Hall have read religious meaning into *cheng* 誠, (Kor. *sōng*) one of the key concepts of the *Zhongyong*.

Cheng has traditionally been translated into English as “sincerity” or “integrity.” However, Ames and Hall render it as “creativity.” From their perspective, creativity signifies neither creation out of nothing (*creatio ex nihilo*) by the transcendent Christian God nor novelty in arts (Ames 2004, 282). By such a translation, they emphasize the creative role of humans in the cosmic process (Ibid.). They have chosen this rendition because “creativity involves a dynamic partnership between the living human world and its natural, social, and cultural contexts, achieving consummation through effective communication in family and community” (Ames and Hall 2001, 63). According to Ames, “human beings are co-creators in the cosmos” (2004, 282).

Ames discovers in “creativity” the religiousness of Confucianism. He defines the *Zhongyong* as “human-centered religiousness” (Rosemont and Ames 2009, 60). In other words, it is a religion without deities that affirms the accumulated experiences of humans themselves. Here, the meaning of “religion” by Ames and Hall differs from that of revealed religions. The religiousness of Confucianism lies in bringing about qualitative change to human life through everyday affairs:

Classical Confucianism is at once a-theistic, and profoundly religious. It is a religion without a God; it is a religion that affirms the cumulative human experience itself. Confucianism celebrates the way in which the process of human growth and extension both is shaped by, and contributes to, the meaning of the totality—what I will call human “co-creativity.” In the classical literature, the process of “co-creativity” has many related expressions (*ren* 仁, *junzi* 君子, *shengren* 聖人, *shen* 神, *he* 和, *zhongyong* 中庸), but in all cases it is, to use John Dewey’s expression, “doing and undergoing” in the effort to get the most out of one’s experiences. (Ames 2003, 165)

According to Ames and Hall, the *Zhongyong* is a “non-theistic and profoundly religious” document that bears the key to ancient Confucianism, which stressed the processes of human growth and expansion (Ames and Hall 2001, 52). Unlike theistic religions, which see the Creator(s) as the origin of the world and place the worship of such god(s) at the center of religious rituals, Confucianism seeks to secure religiousness in individual experiences in everyday practices. Although a Creator who can ensure the world does not exist, Confucianism helps humans to transform themselves through experiences in daily life. Ames and Hall define this process as the religious life:

Confucian religious experience is a product of the interdependencies of the members of a community where the quality of the religious life is a direct consequence of the quality of communal living. . . Further, Confucian religiousness is neither salvific nor eschatological. While it does entail a kind of transformation, it is a transformation of the quality of living in and through the ordinary affairs of the day. (Ibid.)

This interpretation constructs the *Zhongyong* as a text which shows that humans can become one with the world through moral transformation, a process to realize cosmic values inherent in themselves. In thus seeking to read the *Zhongyong* to the exclusion of a language of substance, Ames and Halls’ interpretation is significant because it does not confine the East within the Western perspective. Nevertheless, these scholars’ attempt, too, is problematic. The dichotomous perspective that they use to distinguish between the East and the

West still confines the former within Westerners' image. In particular, when one sticks to a dichotomy, which emphasizes differences, grasping the universal characteristics of the classical traditions of the East and the West becomes more difficult. In addition, when one seeks to view Confucianism from a single perspective, as do Ames and Hall, then revealing the characteristics of Confucian classics grows more challenging, for these classics are context-dependent texts that, in the process of historical development, can be interpreted differently according to the era and the individual.

The key spirit of the *Zhongyong* cannot be grasped solely through the fluidity of processes and events. On the contrary, the world presupposed by this text contains the origin of unchanging values. The *Tian*, *Tianming* 天命, and *Shangdi* described in the *Zhongyong* are constant terms that do not change regardless of cosmological changes. However, Confucianism focuses not on the logical demonstration of proof of the unchanging origin but on the contexts and relations in which that origin is realized through human endeavors.

Tu Wei-Ming: Religiousness of Self-Transcendence

A contemporary American scholar of Chinese philosophy, Tu Wei-Ming likewise reads religious aspects in the *Zhongyong*. He defines such religiousness of Confucianism on the level of self-transformation:

We can define the Confucian way of being religious as *ultimate self-transformation as a communal act and as a faithful dialogical response to the transcendent*. (Tu 1989, 94)

Tu hopes that his work will “show how the seemingly unconnected aphoristic statements in [the *Zhongyong*] make sense as integral parts of a coherent thesis on personality, society, and religion” (Ibid., 3).¹² According to him, humans “can reach the highest state of humanity through personal cultivation” (Ibid., 95). A certain kind of movement from the self to society and then to Heaven, this process enables humans to attain self-transcendence:

We can say that Confucian religiosity is expressed through the infinite potential and the inexhaustible strength of each human being for self-transcendence. (Ibid., 94)

Tu understands the process of human transformation as self-transcendence because he presumably believes that human efforts made in everyday life can go beyond the daily life that we experience and can be connected to the world of transcendence or Heaven. According to him, human endeavors signify a process of rising from the self to society, then from society to Heaven:

The movement from the self via the community to *Heaven* is predicated on a holistic vision of human self-transcendence. . . . The Confucian conviction that a person's self-cultivation is the root of social order and that universal peace depends on social order has far-reaching implications for our perception of the linkage between the person and the community on the one hand and the community and the transcendent on the other. (Ibid., 94)

Of course, Tu does not seem to be alluding to transcendence in the strict sense or to the existence of Heaven here.¹³ It is difficult to view the “transcendent” and “Heaven” that he mentions as analogies of the Christian God. Nevertheless, he seems to stress the human attempt at self-improvement and the ensuing transformation can go beyond the real world and society and rise to a certain level that is universal to the entire world. Seeing the Confucian religiosity lying in this very vision of transcendence, Tu thus interprets chapter one of the *Zhongyong*:

What Heaven imparts to man is called human nature. To follow human nature is called the Way. Cultivating the Way is called teaching. (Tu 1989, 5–6)

Tu ascertains the religiousness of the *Zhongyong* in the junction of Heaven and human self-transcendence. Though such an interpretation seems similar to that of Ames and Hall, who seek to elucidate the religiousness of Confucianism on the level of self-transformation, there are clear differences. As imagined by

Tu, the world of the *Zhongyong* presupposes elements such as Heaven and the transcendent, which, though different from the Christian sense, still take on a substantial nature.¹⁴

However, unlike transcendent deities, the *Tian* of Confucianism is intrinsic. In Confucianism, *Tian* is neither a Creator of the universe nor a transcendent principle existing before the emergence of the world. Consequently, “transcendent” is not a concept appropriate for expressing the religiousness of Confucianism. In Confucianism, which does not presuppose a transcendent reality outside the world, the goal of self-transformation is not transcendence but is self-completion in the sense of unhindered realization of already internalized values. Such a process of continuous self-realization takes on an immanent nature.

The interpretations of the *Zhongyong* by Legge, whose perspective was Christian, and by Tu, who defines the process of human cultivation as self-transcendence on the level of the ultimate reality and human nature, seem to remain within Western philosophy related to a Christian worldview. Ames and Hall were against these Christian and Western-centered translations of the *Zhongyong*. Nevertheless, even their interpretation has its limitation. This is because Western translators’ interpretation of the *Zhongyong* is biased toward grasping the ontological characteristics inherent in the text. In that they both presuppose a certain kind of ontological understanding, attempts to fix the system of the *Zhongyong* into a substantial worldview and attempts to relocate the text in a world of fluid processes are identical. This is the case because not only “reality,” “essence,” and “transcendence,” but also “processes” and “events” are terms explicating the ontological level that serves as the basis of change.¹⁵ Even though Western translators have sought to capture the *Zhongyong* within the large framework of changes in human existence, they in fact seem to have focused, instead, on introducing the more fundamental and ontological framework that makes such changes possible.

Although different from the Western concept of reality or of God, Korean Confucians writing in the 17th, 18th, and early 19th century likewise saw in the *Zhongyong* certain unchanging and fundamental values and believed in the *Tianming* that held such values. For them, *Tianming* was an origin of values working practically in everyday lives. What was important to the Confucians

was not the goal or zenith of cultivation, such as Heaven, but human acts of moral awakening and praxis performed every day. Confucians focused on the regulation of one's own emotions that arose when in contact with external objects in repeated daily acts of praxis. This is because Confucians understood *zhong* and *yong* primarily as the expressions of a desirable mental state and the world of daily life in which this mind-heart was in action. Morality consisted in securing social and political legitimacy through the praxis of *zhong* and *yong*. Although both the *Daxue* and the *Zhongyong* emphasize the transformation of the self, the direction of such change is not to rise to become one with a transcendent being outside the world, but to aim at stability in the family, society, and state.

Western translators have focused on the ontological structure of the world determining such changes and human rise or transcendence within that structure. To them, religion continued to be grasped through the theological image of transcendence.

Korean Confucians' Religious Approach to the *Zhongyong*

Yun Hyu: Tian Studies (事天學) Serving Intrinsic Tian

The idea of Matteo Ricci and James Legge that the ancient Chinese classics included a religious belief in a personal god, as long as their interpretation of *Tian* and *Shangdi* are not strictly limited to the Christian God, would win support from East Asian Confucians in the pre-modern period as well as from contemporary researchers.

The argument of Ricci and Legge, that the religiousness of ancient Confucianism was severed because Neo-Confucianism replaced the personal and presiding *Tian* of ancient Confucianism with a fundamental and ideological *li* 理 principle, can also be supported to a certain extent. This is because certain Chosŏn Confucians exhibited similar efforts toward reviving the attitude of serving *Tian* (*shi tian*; Kor. *sach'ŏn* 事天) found in ancient Confucianism. In Chosŏn, the *Zhongyong* was highly valued by many scholars. Most Chosŏn Confucians interpreted this text following Zhu Xi, especially regarding his theory of *li* and *qi* 氣 (Kor. *ki*). Unlike them, however, certain intellectuals

understood *Tian-Shangdi* in the *Zhongyong* as a personal being and sought to reestablish the encounter between *Shangdi* and humans on a moral level. Yun Hyu 尹鑰 (penname Paekho 白湖; 1617–1680), Yi Pyök 李彙 (penname Kwangam 曠庵; baptismal name John; 1754–1786), and Chŏng Yagyong 丁若鏞 (penname Tasan 茶山; 1762–1836) are the representative examples of such an approach and interpretation. Instead of explicating the structure and mechanism of the world through *li*, these scholars stressed humankind’s moral awakening and praxis through a personified *Shangdi* and *Shangdi*’s intervention in the world. Such an interpretation of the *Zhongyong* can be called a religious approach in that it stresses human moral awakening stemming from both a personified deity (*Shangdi*) and reverence for it.

In Korean Confucianism, the first attempt to go beyond general trends in the interpretation of the *Zhongyong* was made by Yun Hyu, a Confucian scholar from the mid-Chosŏn dynasty (1392–1910). If Korean Confucians had heretofore interpreted this text on the level of justifying the metaphysics of Neo-Confucianism, Yun Hyu developed his own perspective by first rejecting the thirty-three-chapter system of the *Zhongyong* as organized by Zhu Xi. Having analyzed the significance of the work from a new viewpoint, Yun Hyu thought that chapter one held the key message of the entire text and therefore reclassified the *Zhongyong*.¹⁶

In interpreting chapter one of the *Zhongyong*, Yun Hyu succinctly disclosed his perspective with the phrase, “A sage’s ways of serving *Tian* and a *junzi*’s profound acknowledgment of such ways” (Yun 1974b, ch. 3, fasc. 36). In other words, this text consisted of the methods in which humans served and revered *Tian* and a *junzi*’s (Confucian gentleman) acts of directly experiencing those methods. Yun Hyu saw *Tian* as the personal *Shangdi*. He stated thus in “Chagyŏngmun” 自警文, which he penned in his twenties:

I spend each day in care and fear, respect and forbearance, and always watch the time and signs. I speak first of *Shangdi*, second also of *Shangdi*, respect and respect again, and take care as if [*Shangdi*] were above and below, to the left and to the right. (Yun 1974)

Yun Hyu impressed on himself that the emotional attitude of fear and reverence for *Tian-Shangdi* was important for the process of cultivation for self-transformation and improvement. Later, in a record on reading the *Zhongyong*, he would stress an attitude of “caution and apprehension” (戒慎恐懼) and “self-watchfulness in solitude” (慎獨) as an important mental attitude for a *junzi* in revering *Tian* (Yun 1974c).

However, in light of Yun Hyu’s interpretation of the first chapter of the *Zhongyong* as “A *junzi* fears *Tian* 天 and cultivates the way (*dao* 道) of *zhongyong*,” the actual meaning of his expressions “fearing *Tian*” (畏天) and “serving *Tian*” (事天) must be considered carefully. From early on, he wholeheartedly agreed with Mencius’s remark that one should “preserve one’s mind-heart to nurture one’s innate nature (本性) and, through such acts, serve *Tian*.”¹⁷ Consequently, Yun thought that one could serve *Tian* by realizing thoroughly one’s mind-heart through the daily act of serving one’s parents (孝親) (Yun 1974a). Though Yun Hyu stressed an attitude of fearing and serving *Tian-Shangdi*, the fear and forbearance of *Tian* that he mentioned were, in the end, very similar to a *junzi*’s process of quotidian self-cultivation (為己). In other words, he identified, as the meaning of serving *Tian*, a *junzi*’s efforts to practice filial piety and fraternal devotion (孝悌) with the ordinary mind-heart common to all humans (人心) in the space of ordinary quotidian life (日用), where this mind-heart was in action (Ibid.).

For Yun Hyu, then, what meaning would the being called *Shangdi* have held? As “Chagyōngmun” shows, it is true that he presupposed in *Shangdi* a strong, personal being that aroused the emotion of fear. Nevertheless, though clearly an object of fear, his *Shangdi* never directly encouraged or supervised humans. As stressed in the *Zhongyong*, only a *junzi* who understood his *Tian*-given innate nature (天命之性) and realized the “workings of *Tian* above (上天之載)” —or the mechanism of *Shangdi* and the principle behind it—voluntarily controlled his mind-heart and was concerned about ethical human relations in the family and society (Yun 1974b, ch. 10). Quoting his senior Confucian, Yun Hyu said, “It is possible for a man to obtain the mystery of becoming one with *Tian* even when his acts of virtue do not exceed quotidian ethics (彝倫) and can achieve the effect of nurturing the world and all things even when his fear and respect for *Tian* does not go beyond everyday life” (Yun 1974b, ch. 1). From

his statement, which goes on to speak of the “union of *Tian* and humans” (合天人), it is clear that what he also calls his “study of serving *Tian*” (事天學) was based on a thoroughly intrinsic view of *Tian* (Yun 1974a).

In thus seeing a *junzi*'s self-cultivation as leading to service of *Tian* and an attitude of fear and reverence for *Tian-Shangdi* as resulting in self-completion on yet another level, Yun Hyu, among contemporary thinkers, can be considered to have preempted the unique viewpoint of understanding the *Zhongyong* maintained by intellectuals of the following generation (eighteenth century), such as intellectuals with Confucian literacy like Yi Pyök and Chöng Yagyong. Despite their conscious rediscovery of a personal *Shangdi*, these scholars focused more on the conflicts and changes in the mind-heart and on the process of self-conquest by a *junzi* seeking to improve oneself.

Yi Pyök: Self-Introspection toward Shangdi

The second group of Korean Confucians to interpret the *Zhongyong* from a religious perspective consisted of Yi Pyök and Chöng Yagyong. Yi Pyök¹⁸ was a Confucian who lived around the time of Chöng Yagyong and was a baptized Christian. Because he studied under Kwön Ch'ölsin 權哲身 (penname Nogam 鹿庵; baptismal name Ambrose; 1736–1801), a former student of Yi Ik 李瀼 (penname Söngho 星湖; 1681–1763), he is generally considered to have succeeded to Yi Ik's academic tradition. Yi Pyök was an open-minded young scholar who led in-depth academic discussions with figures such as Yi Kahwan 李家煥 (penname Kūmdae 錦帶; 1742–1801), Chöng Yakchön 丁若銓 (penname Chasan 茲山; 1758–1816), Chöng Yakchong 丁若鍾 (baptismal name Augustine; 1760–1801), and Chöng Yagyong (Yi Pyök 1986, 19).

Having become acquainted with Christianity through classical Chinese translations of books of Western learning (*Söhak* 西學), Yi Pyök, upon hearing that his friend Yi Sünghun 李承薰 (penname Manch'ön 蔓川; baptismal name Peter; 1756–1801) would be accompanying his father to Beijing, encouraged the latter to meet a Western missionary and to be baptized. Yi Sünghun was then indeed baptized—the first Korean to receive this sacrament—by Father Jean-Joseph de Grammont in China in 1784. After returning to Korea, Yi

Sūnghun baptized Yi Pyōk and named him “John.” When the Chosŏn government began its persecution of Christians, Yi Pyōk was tormented by his family’s opposition, and he ultimately died of a contagious disease in 1785. As for his Christianity-related works, two are extant: the Korean-language *Ch’ōnju konggyōngga* 天主恭敬歌 (An ode to reverent Lord of Heaven) and the *Sōnggyo yoji* 聖教要旨 (Essentials of the holy teaching), a four-syllable verse (四言絕句) in classical Chinese. These works are contained in a manuscript collection titled the *Manch’ōn yugo* 蔓川遺稿 (Surviving writings of Manch’ōn Yi Sūnghun) and are known to have been edited by Yi Sūnghun along with works by other Confucians martyred during the so-called Sinyu pakhae 辛酉迫害, or Catholic Persecution of 1801.¹⁹

Yi Pyōk’s religious beliefs are demonstrated well by the *Sōnggyo yoji*, which was Korea’s first work on Christian apologetics written independently of the West. This text shows the tranquil coexistence of a Confucian orientation and Catholic faith. In its first chapter, the author declares, “*Shangdi*, the only deity, existed before men were born.”²⁰ The work’s first half, comprising chapters one through fifteen, addresses the acts of *Tianzhu* (God) and Jesus based on the contents of the Bible. Chapters sixteen through thirty then describe a Confucian attitude, including humaneness, filial piety (孝誠), obligations (道理) of scholar-gentlemen (士), responsibilities of government officials, good deeds and faith, and corruption of this world. After proving the existence of *Tianzhu* through natural phenomena, Chapters 31–49 urge readers to put their faith into practice. And in the final chapter, Yi Pyōk recapitulates this process by using the key concepts and terms of Confucianism:

A benevolent ruler like Emperors Yu 禹, Tang 湯, Yao 堯, and Shun 舜
in command of subjects and officials;
in being watchful of and rectifying the world
a sage like Zhong You 仲由 and Min Sun 閔損, Confucius and Mencius.
Gauging blind adherence to others and license, probity and simplicity,
He strictly distinguishes the *Daoli* 道理 (Way of Principle) of men;
burn evil, soothe the burning heart,
seek ardently for *Tianzhu*.

The section above speaks of how Christianity and its believers must rectify their mind-hearts (正心) and make their intentions sincere (誠意) in serving the ruler and governing the people. For men must by rights gauge truth and falsehood, and strictly distinguished are standards that believers must abide by. If one by rights abides by them as a believer, why should one worry about not being saved from fire for a *kalpa* (永劫)? One must therefore begin with the task of serving *Shangdi* brightly (昭事上帝) with all one's heart (盡心). (Yi Pyök 1986, 139–140)

Yi Pyök thus avers through a magnificent poem that Confucianism and Catholicism do not constitute a problem of choice due to their supposed incompatibility. The beginning of faith that he spoke of lay in the *zhaoshizhixue* 昭事之學, or the “study of serving *Shangdi* brightly,” which had been one of the key goals of Confucianism since ancient times. Yi Pyök described respect for *Tianzhu* in terms of “serving *Shangdi* brightly,” or an account of King Wen's (文王) devoted service to *Shangdi* in a passage from “Zhengmin” 蒸民 in the “*Daya*” 大雅 of the *Book of Odes* (*Shijing* 詩經). The study of serving *Shangdi* brightly is also highlighted in Ricci's *Tianzhu shiyi*. Ricci likewise had diagnosed, “The teaching which commands the service of the Sovereign on High (*Shangdi*) has long been neglected” (Ricci 1985, 439).²¹

However, the actual acts of “serving *Shangdi* brightly” that Yi Pyök depicts in this chapter of the *Sōnggyo yoji* are closer to those of a Confucian *junzi* who puts into practice the transformation of a ruler into a sage king (致君) and the consequent reversion of benefits to the people (澤民) based on the step of self-cultivation (修身) in the *Daxue* (*Great Learning*), such as rectifying one's mind-heart and making one's intentions sincere. Leading one's daily life piously, sincerely, and morally based on an understanding of *Shangdi* and *Tianming* can be said to be true faith in Yi Pyök's view.

If the *Sōnggyo yoji* is a work that reveals full-fledged faith, Chōng Yagyong's *Chungyong kangūibo* 中庸講義補 (Supplement to the discussion of the *Zhongyong*), based on his discussions with Yi Pyök, is one that shows the intellectual situation following Yi Pyök's acceptance of the Christian worldview as a Confucian. Yi Pyök's reading of the *Zhongyong* can be seen as an important case

wherein Confucians were able to embrace the Christian faith without discarding the worldview and ideology of Confucianism.

According to Chǒng Yagyong, Yi Pyōk spread Western teachings (i.e., Roman Catholicism), considerably influencing those around him.²² Indeed, one of those who followed Yi Pyōk was none other than Chǒng Yagyong himself. To answer seventy questions on the *Zhongyong* posed by King Chǒngjo 正祖 (1752–1800; r. 1776–1800), Chǒng Yagyong visited and held in-depth discussions on the text with Yi Pyōk, the brother-in-law of his eldest brother, Chǒng Yakhyōn 丁若鉉 (courtesy name T'aehyōn 台玄; 1751–1821), in the twenty-third summer of his life (1784). Consequently, the two men's discussions presupposed the *Tianzhu shiyi* from the start.²³ When later reorganizing the discussions in writing, Chǒng Yagyong would separately indicate Yi Pyōk's statements with the remark, "The following are statements from Yi Pyōk."²⁴ Though Yi Pyōk's statements are not numerous, some of the passages demonstrate how he connected the worldview of the *Zhongyong* to an attitude of religious faith toward *Shangdi*. First, Yi Pyōk claimed that the concept of *Taiji* must not be introduced into the interpretation of the *Zhongyong*:

The subtle language and profound meaning of the *Zhongyong* can all be found thoroughly in the *Zhongyong*. Why should one have to speak [of the text] by adding *Taiji*?²⁵

He sought to deny *Taiji-li*, which in Neo-Confucianism was seen as the metaphysical origin of all beings:

Li cannot necessarily be seen as the origin of ten thousand principles (*lizhi* 理致). In speaking of *li*, Neo-Confucians of the Song Dynasty said that the *li* called *Taiji* originated from the empty and vastly blue sky. In my view, this is difficult to agree with.²⁶

In Zhu Xi's view, *Taiji* was the collective name for the *li* of everything in the world and inhered in each individual object. *Taiji* was not a transcendent personal deity. Therefore, the relationship between *Taiji* and all things was not understood in terms of the creation of all things by a transcendent deity.

Neo-Confucians thought that a “transcendent Creator separated temporally and spatially from the material world was not necessary because *li* and *qi* had always existed” (Baker 1997, 75).

However, Ricci either did not acknowledge or preferred to ignore this point. Based on the Aristotelian *substantia-accidens*, he argued that *Taiji* was merely a substance-dependent attribute. To Ricci, *Taiji* was but an illusion (Ricci 1985, 106). In the end, Yi Pyök’s statement that *Taiji* cannot be the origin of all principles can be seen as an effect of reading the *Zhongyong* through the *Tianzhu shiyi*. As a more fundamental concept through which the text could be understood, he proposed *Tianming*:

For, in general, the book called the *Zhongyong* begins and ends each passage with *Tianming*, herein lies the beginning and end of *dao* 道.²⁷

In Yi Pyök’s view, humans and *Tian* were connected through *Tianming*, and the *Zhongyong* was precisely the classic that demonstrated such a relationship. Although he mentioned neither *Shangdi* nor *Tianzhu* in this work, he was already leaning toward the Christian faith, and the significance of *Tianming* for him went beyond the perspectives of ordinary Confucians.

In Yi Pyök’s view, the expression *Tianming* consisted of two axes: “knowing *Tian*” (知天), signifying an understanding of *Tian*; and the “workings of *Tian* above” (上天之載), signifying acts performed by *Tian*. If “knowing *Tian*” consisted of the human knowledge and praxis of *Tianming*, “workings of *Tian* above” was a phrase that literally signified that *Tian* presided over all things. Yi Pyök sought to understand this presidency of *Tian* on a personal level. *Tian* was neither simply the physical sky nor a figurative expression for *li*. Because the “workings of *Tian* above,” or acts performed by *Tian*, signified the concrete actions of *Tianzhu-Shangdi*, Yi Pyök thought that *Tian* must not be interpreted as an impersonal principle such as the theory of *li* and *qi*.

Yi Pyök’s interpretation of “Confucius spoke. Magnificent are the benefits of *guishen* 鬼神,” a passage from chapter sixteen of the *Zhongyong*, shows well how he personified *Tian*. Also used to mean “ghosts and spirits,” *guishen* was originally seen in Neo-Confucianism as an impersonal force signifying the bending and stretching, or the contraction and extension, of *qi*. Neo-Confucians

consistently interpreted *guishen* as the action of an impersonal and natural *qi*. Consequently, with respect to the passage explaining that “something obscure is revealed” in interpreting *guishen*, Neo-Confucians interpreted it as the mechanism of the obscure *li*. Yi Pyök, however, interpreted the passage as the virtues of *Tian* (*Tiande* 天德):

The second evidence is that because there is neither outside nor inside in what *Tian* does, [*Shangdi*] is replete wherever veneration rites are performed and seems to exist here at all times. Because what *Tian* does embodies everything and does not omit anything, nothing can depart from *Tian* even for a moment. The third evidence is that because what *Tian* does includes everything and *Tian* serves as the substance (本體) of all things, nothing can be separated from *Tian*.²⁸

Rejecting the Neo-Confucian interpretation, which sought to view the “workings of *Tian* above” as a result of the natural mechanism of *li* without artificial intervention, Yi Pyök stressed the mechanism and intervention of a personal *Shangdi* in all things. Just as Ricci had stated, “The Lord of Heaven (*Tianzhu*) is without bodily form and is omnipresent. Nothing can be separated from Him or leave Him” (Ricci 1985, 225), Yi Pyök likewise seems, through Confucian concepts, to have described the image of an omnipresent *Tianzhu* that did not depart from anything.

Yi Pyök may be seen as a good example of the acceptance of Catholicism that Ricci had anticipated. However, his faith did not demand the wholesale replacement of all premises of life and a deep-rooted worldview. Yi Pyök’s thought can be seen as the product of reading the *Zhongyong* and books of Western learning in an overlapping manner and understanding both worlds eclectically. He thought within Confucianism and combined it with his Christian faith because the direction that he pursued did not lie in the worship of divinity. If Christianity awakened Yi Pyök to the existence of a transcendent and personal deity, the Confucianism deeply rooted in him confirmed that the progress toward God must consist of moral cultivation and reflection. This is because, as has been demonstrated by the *Sönggyo yoji*, for him, the task of serving *Shangdi* did not go beyond the process of cultivation, elucidated in the *Daxue* and the

Mengzi, of “rectifying one’s mind-heart (正心),” “making one’s intentions sincere (誠意),” and “completely realizing one’s mind-heart (盡心).”

In that respect, Yi Pyök’s thought can be viewed as a philosophy of human self-realization, where one’s character is transformed through cultivation and reflection before *Tianming*. He was unable to reach philosophical and religious development due to opposition from those around him and despair at the climate of the era, which led to his death. Nevertheless, there was a Confucian who connected the two worlds even more creatively than did Yi Pyök. This was Chōng Yagyong, who became acquainted with the *Tianzhu shiyi* through Yi Pyök.

Chōng Yagyong: Shangdi as Moral Monitor

Chōng Yagyong was to state later that when he first came in contact with Western learning in his early twenties, he had done so with the motive of broadening his knowledge and perceived Western learning as a “separate school of Confucianism.” He would also explain that his motive for this initial curiosity had been a desire to pursue scientific interest fashionable in the world, such as theories in astronomy and calendrical science, machines for agricultural administration and irrigation, and methods for measurements and experiments.²⁹

His encounter with Yi Pyök prompted Chōng Yagyong to turn his attention to the metaphysical problems conveyed by Western learning. The encounter and discussions with Yi Pyök, which led Chōng Yagyong to Western learning, were then recorded as the *Chungyong kangūi* 中庸講義 (Discussion of the *Zhongyong*). Over thirty years later, his discussions with Yi Pyök were revised and took on final form as the *Chungyong kangūibo*, and he also finished the *Chungyong chajam* 中庸自箴 (Moral lessons drawn from the *Zhongyong*) in the same year (1814).

In the *Tianzhu shiyi*, Ricci had stated that because the concept of *li* lacked movement of its own accord (自動), will (理豈有意), the wish to produce things (何以有欲生物) (Ricci 1985, 111), and rational faculties (理者, 靈覺否, 明義者否) (Ibid., 115), it could not have created this world. Having read the *Tianzhu shiyi*, Chōng Yagyong likewise stated, “While *qi* exists in itself, *li* is something that depends on *qi*, and what is dependent cannot but lean against what exists

of itself.”³⁰ By discarding the fundamental image hitherto held of *li*, he demoted *li* and *Taiji*, which were the highest concepts in Korean Confucianism. Consequently, the close relationship between the fundamental *li* and human nature was severed:

What is the thing called *li*? For *li* has neither love and hate nor joy and anger; it is empty, boundless, nameless, and formless. If we were to say that our innate nature had been endowed from it, it would not easily be a [proper] *dao*.³¹

In fact, the concept of *Shangdi* was an expression used in Neo-Confucianism to personify the presidency of *li*. The two Cheng brothers and Zhu Xi had used the expression *Shangdi*, originating from ancient classics, to stress the ability of *li* to preside over the world. However, when the following statement from Yi Hwang 李滉 (penname T’oegye 退溪; 1502–1571), a Korean Neo-Confucian, is examined, what becomes clear is that the personality spoken of by Neo-Confucians was by no means real but only a rhetorical expression:

There are movements and tranquility in *Taiji* because *Taiji* moves by itself and is tranquil in itself. *Tianming* prevails because *Tianming* prevails of itself. How could there be anyone who makes it do so in turn? (Yi Hwang 1843)

Likewise, for Yi Hwang, *Shangdi* was a being represented personally only to awaken humans morally, never a personal deity that actually existed. To Yi Hwang, personified *Shangdi* was, in the end, not a personal being but a device for securing the piety of the human mind-heart.

For Chǒng Yagyong, however, a personal *Shangdi* was no mere analogical expression for *li*. In his view, it could not be said that we had been endowed with our innate nature from *li*, an impersonal principle utterly devoid of emotions and rational faculties. Hitherto the basis of the production and orderly operation of all things, the concept of *li* was now gone for Chǒng Yagyong. If so, based on what could the world have begun, be in operation, and maintain order? Where were humans to establish the cornerstone of morality? In the

place vacated by *li*, Chǒng Yagyong once again presented *Shangdi*. He stated that there was a being equipped with rational faculties and exercising presidency over all things, which was none other than *Shangdi*:

What is *Shangdi*? *Shangdi* is a being outside heaven and earth, *guishen* and men, a being that created (造化), presides over (宰制), and comfortingly nurtures (安養) heaven and earth, *guishen* and men, and all things. For referring to *Tian* as an “emperor” (帝) is akin to referring to the nation as a “king” (王), one must not point at that most blue sky with a form and call it *Shangdi*.³²

Here, Chǒng Yagyong’s statement that *Shangdi* “created, presides over, and comfortingly nurtures heaven and earth, *guishen* and men, and all things” seems as if borrowed from “discussing *Tianzhu*’s creation of, presidency over, and comforting nurturance of all things,”³³ the title of the first chapter of the *Tianzhu shiyi*. Chǒng Yagyong seems to have obtained from the *Tianzhu shiyi* a clue to the idea that neither the blue sky nor the impersonal *li* could be the metaphysical origin of all things. He turned his attention not to *li* as an impersonal principle but to *Shangdi* as a being that personally controlled and bestowed order and harmony on the world. However, what Chǒng Yagyong in fact enthroned as the origin of all things instead of *li* was not *Tianzhu* but the *Shangdi* of the ancient Confucian classics:

A *junzi* is careful not to dare to perform evil even in a dark room because he knows that *Shangdi* has descended upon him. If *ming* 命, *xing* 性, *dao*, and *jiao* 教 all were to belong to a single *li* now, for *li* originally had neither perception nor authority, how would one be watchful and forbear, fear and be afraid?³⁴

Having problematized *li* for its impersonality and thus denied its ability to preside over the world, Chǒng Yagyong also opposed the view of *guishen* as a mechanism of the impersonal *qi* in the same vein and sought to revive the personality of *guishen* apparent in ancient Confucian classics. Stating that

guishen “[could] not be seen as either *li* or *qi*,”³⁵ he said that *Shangdi* was at the top of beings without form or quality, such as *guishen*:

Guishen cannot be seen as either *li* or *qi*. Standing thickly in heaven and earth are *guishen*, and the noblest and greatest being [of them] is none other than *Shangdi*. How could King Wen’s bright service to *Shangdi* through care and respect and the attitude of fear and forbearance allude to in the *Zhongyong* not be the act of serving *Shangdi* brightly?³⁶

In the end, in Chǒng Yagyong’s view, the mentioning of *Shangdi* in the ancient classics and diverse veneration rites was evidence of this divine yet formless being’s existence. Thinking that the world must not be operated based on an impersonal principle, he sought to introduce a religious level of a certain kind. According to Chǒng Yagyong, there was a greater danger of moral license in a world without a *Shangdi* looking down over humans. This presumably is why he reintroduced into his philosophy a personal *Shangdi*, which had not been clear in Confucianism.

However, the *Shangdi* here is not an absolute being requiring the worship and faith of humans. The context in which *Shangdi* is demanded is the site of the rational and autonomous moral judgment and praxis of humans who perceive its existence. In this context, Chǒng Yagyong’s theism is directed not at theology but at humanism. He never moves toward the worship of divinity. He demanded *Shangdi* so strongly solely in situations involving problems related to character and human ethics (人倫): “It is always up to human ethics whether Heaven (*Tian* 天) watches men’s good and evil [deeds]. Accordingly, men’s self-cultivation and service to Heaven, too, lie solely in endeavoring [to practice] human ethics.”³⁷ Through this statement, Chǒng Yagyong made it clear that the “study of serving *Tian*” that he emphasized was by no means oriented toward the worship of a transcendent external or a metaphysical origin.

The “study of serving *Shangdi* brightly” mentioned by Chǒng Yagyong did not go beyond human affairs. He stated, “The book called the *Zhongyong* was originally based on *Tianming*, but that *dao* was only men’s *dao*.”³⁸ In the end, Chǒng Yagyong’s strategy was to bring *Shangdi* into daily human lives and the mind-hearts of those leading such lives. In this context, *Shangdi* emerged not as

an object of faith and worship but as a moral monitor for human moral acts. The task of choosing and resolving on specific acts in accordance with the path of the moral command engraved in the mind-heart all belonged to humans. Although *Shangdi* was a kind of religious being in Chǒng Yagyong's philosophical system, it was neither a commander who made humans surrender to authority through acts of direct compensation, such as the meting out of rewards and punishments, nor much less a transcendent being and the object of religious services and worship.

What Chǒng Yagyong sought to construct was not a "theology" but a fundamental being that imposed on human moral duties and responsibilities so that the world would not turn into an arena of the scramble for power. *Shangdi* remained in the position of a moral monitor yet did not directly intervene in human affairs, and humans were always mindful of *Shangdi* but did not worship or hold religious faith in it. *Shangdi* was not a judge who intervened in human affairs and punished evil and rewarded good, but rather a kind of psychological monitor, always prompting humans to awaken through the moral command of *Tianming*. By demanding a *Shangdi* of such a nature, Chǒng Yagyong saw and understood humans neither as passive beings yoked to a divine world and performing moral acts out of fear, nor as the completely free and independent center of the universe capable of legislating everything on their own.

Conclusion

Traditionally in Korea, the *Zhongyong* was understood as the study of cultivation (修養學) of a *junzi* who sought to realize wholly the picture of *li* through moral self-cultivation and praxis in this world. In this respect, Yun Hyu, Yi Pyōk, and Chǒng Yagyong can be said to have differed from other Korean Confucians in the direction of their thinking. Although they, too, placed weight on self-improvement and personal change as the subject of moral praxis, they sought to redraw the world picture which was the basis of such ideas. Their question was simple: Despite a perfect principle regulating the world (*li*), why is the world out of joint and in a moral disorder, and why have individuals lost

the motive power for praxis? Faced with such a question, they placed their hopes not on *li* but on *Tian-Shangdi*, which functioned as a moral monitor in ancient Chinese classics.

Yun Hyu stressed serving *Tian* in daily life, and Yi Pyök and Chöng Yagyong newly explained the logic of moral praxis, emphasizing the personality of a *Shangdi* revived from ancient Confucianism. The philosophies of Yun Hyu, Yi Pyök, and Chöng Yagyong can be said to have begun with *Tian* and ended with humans. This is the precise point at which the thinking of Korean Confucians cannot but diverge from that of the *Tianzhu shiyi*, which began and ended with *Tian*, and moved toward the divinity and worship of God. Although these Korean Confucians did introduce the personality of *Shangdi* into the context of human life, they did not aim at reverence for and belief in a transcendent being.

Interpretations of the *Zhongyong* by Western translators and Korean Confucians examined in this paper emphasized the awakening and moral introspection of humans as special beings in the universe. Western translators were not unlike Yun Hyu, Yi Pyök, and Chöng Yagyong in that they read the metaphysical world in the *Zhongyong*. However, the intellectual genealogy of Korean Confucianism from Yun Hyu to Chöng Yagyong did not only recognize the metaphysical world picture of the *Zhongyong*, from which they proceeded to find the ethics of self transformation in praxis. Rather than trying simply to determine the master of the universe and humankind, they attempted to set the underlying reality intervening in moral sentiments, and from this to create the subordinate norms of a moral philosophy.

The religious interpretations of Yun, Yi, and Chöng overlapped with a metaphysical world picture and the guidelines of moral philosophy. The metaphysical world picture was but a kind of regulative *idée* for such moral guidelines. Yun Hyu, Yi Pyök, and Chöng Yagyong all sought to revive *Shangdi* from the *Zhongyong*. However, their approach differed from an ontological understanding of *Shangdi* as a transcendent being or of Heaven beyond the terrestrial world. It was rather an ethical demand, seeking to induce human self-transformation through the internalization of *Shangdi* or *Tianming* as *Shangdi*'s order.

The religious interpretation of the *Zhongyong* by Yun Hyu, Yi Pyök, and Chöng Yagyong makes it possible to reexamine from a Confucian viewpoint

the validity of Western translators' reading of the text. These Korean Confucians' understanding of the work includes the dynamism of self-transformation as grasped by Western translators. However, such dynamism is interpreted to be revealed through self-introspection on trivial and common emotions and acts on a quotidian level. Strictly speaking, self-transformation is nothing but the plain human way of rectifying one's mind-heart and making one's intentions sincere, not a process of religious rising or transcendence. In this respect, the religiousness of the *Zhongyong* captured by Western translators can be acknowledged only in a limited way within the flow of Korean Confucianism, which had understood this text from the traditional Confucian vantage. Yun Hyu, Yi Pyök, and Chöng Yagyong demonstrated that it was possible to secure a certain kind of religiousness, even without the use of expressions such as "self-transcendence," with moral sensibility and praxis in daily life alone. The *Tian-Shangdi* these scholars spoke of was not a deity or a transcendent being residing outside the phenomenal world, but approximated a moral monitor close to the lives of individuals and a moral legislator existing within every person.

Notes

- 1 To avoid confusion, though Korean pronunciations of key terms will be given, this paper will continue to use the Chinese pronunciation throughout.
- 2 Jesuit missionaries who entered China at the end of the sixteenth century, such as Nicholas Longobardi (Nicolò Longobardo) and Matteo Ricci, completed Latin translations of the *Lunyu* (*Analects*), *Daxue* (*Great Learning*), and *Zhongyong*, which subsequently had considerable intellectual impact in Europe. See David E. Mungello (1985) and Lionel M. Jensen (1997).
- 3 For a more in-depth study of Legge, see Girardot (2002).
- 4 After including his Christian-centered translation of the *Zhongyong* in his *Chinese Classics*, a two-volume work originally published in 1861, Legge published his English rendition of the *Liji* 禮記 (*Book of Rites*) in 1885 as a part of the *Sacred Books of the East* series. Wang Hui has reviewed Legge's two translations of the *Zhongyong* from the perspective of Orientalism in his *Translating Chinese Classics*

in a Colonial Context: James Legge and His Two Versions of the *Zhongyong* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2008). He has evaluated Legge's 1861 translation of the text, which viewed *Tian* as the Christian God, as a work based on missionary Orientalism and the latter's second or 1885 translation of the same text as a work based on academic Orientalism, respectively. Wang Hui has pointed out four limitations in Legge's 1861 rendition, including the translation of *Tian* as "Heaven" or "God" and the understanding of the sages (聖人) as equivalent to Heaven or God. Included in this 1861 translation is the *Zhongyong*, which was originally a chapter of the *Liji*. In his second translation, Legge exhibited changed to his previous, Christian reading such as: seeing humans as capable of becoming creative partners to heaven and earth by following their innate nature; not displaying antipathy toward Chinese cosmology that was not directed toward a transcendent being but saw intrinsic transcendence as possible; and retranslating *cheng* 誠 as the "perfection of nature" from his earlier "mysterious sincerity." Despite these differences, he neither retracted his perspective on *Tian* ultimately as Heaven as God, nor modified his view itself of *Tian* as the Christian God in this second translation (Wang 2008, 146).

- 5 Legge supported Ricci's stance (Legge 1888, 58).
- 6 Because Ricci likewise considered *Tian*, which appears in Confucian classics, to be in an analogous relationship with *Deus*, he translated *Tian* as *Deus*, as he did *Shangdi*.
- 7 Following the Chinese rites controversy, most of the terms adopted by Jesuits, such as *Shangdi*, were forbidden by Pope Clement XI's injunction (*Ex illa die*) of 1715. Chinese Christians' ancestor veneration rites, too, were banned.
- 8 中者，不偏不倚無過不及之名。庸，平常也。Legge translated this passage from the *Zhongyong zhangju* 中庸章句: "Zhong is the name for what is without inclination or deflection, which neither exceeds nor comes short. Yong means ordinary, constant" (Legge 1960, 382).
- 9 Based on the critique of Legge by Hall and Ames, Haiming Wen argues that through Legge's Aristotelian translation China's philosophical literature has come to seem a pale imitation of Western thought (Wen 2004, 219).
- 10 As joint researchers, these two figures have engaged in a variety of joint work since *Thinking through Confucius* (1987), among which is *Focusing the Familiar: A Translation and Philosophical Interpretation of the Zhongyong* (2001), a translation of the *Zhongyong*.
- 11 Although Ames and Hall do not use Alfred North Whitehead's categories verbatim in translating the *Zhongyong*, their language of focus and field has been inspired by

Whitehead's so-called process philosophy. In their view, terms from process philosophy are more useful for understanding Chinese classics: "In our use of the language of focus and field we have been largely inspired by the work of Whitehead cited in the Bibliography" (Ames and Hall 2001, 54).

- 12 Titling the chapters "Profound Person," "Fiduciary Community," and "Moral Metaphysics," respectively, he seeks to integrate these three topics.
- 13 "'Self-transformation' suggests that although we are not what we ought to be, we can reach the highest state of humanity through personal cultivation" (Tu 1989, 95).
- 14 When Tu Wei-Ming's interpretation of the first chapter of the *Zhongyong* is compared with the translation by Ames and Hall, it is clear that the latter seeks to avoid a language of substance: "What *tian* 天 commands (*mìng* 命) is called natural tendencies (*xìng* 性); drawing out these natural tendencies is called the proper way (*dao* 道); improving upon this way is called education (*jiao* 教)" (Ames and Hall 2001, 26).
- 15 Even the perspective through which Ames and Hall have introduced a process worldview contrasting with a substantial worldview presupposes an ontological understanding. Through process philosophy, they feel that they "have attempted to introduce ontological understandings that would allow for the appreciation of the role of true creativity in shaping the process and events that comprise the world around us" (Ames and Hall 2001, 54).
- 16 聖人事天之道，君子體道之事 (Yun Hyu 1974c).
- 17 存心養性，事天
- 18 Representative studies on Yi Pyök include Kim Okhüi (1979) and Yi Söngbae (1979).
- 19 The *Manch'ön yugo* is a collection of writings by Yi Sünghun, the first Korean to be baptized, and other Korean Christians. Included in this volume, the *Ch'önju konggyöngga* and the *Sönggyo yoji* bear the name "Yi Pyök" as their author. The *Manch'ön yugo* is a controversial text. Some researchers, including Kim Okhüi, Yi Söngbae, and Ha Söngnae, have accepted as fact that this work was compiled in the 1830s, in the early stage of Chosön's anti-Catholic persecutions, and that Yi Pyök authored the *Sönggyo yoji*. However, in his recent study, Yun Min'gu (2014) argues that the entire *Manch'ön yugo* is spurious and the *Sönggyo yoji* is likewise a forgery penned in the nineteenth or twentieth century, a claim that deserves further research and discussion. Nevertheless, Yi Pyök's authorship of the *Sönggyo yoji* is not to be disproven based solely on the dates of the *Manch'ön yugo* and the *Sönggyo yoji* and

the notational errors therein. Yun Min'gu has argued that the *Sōnggyo yoji* contains numerous Protestant expressions. However, because the possibility of transcribers' errors or intentional modifications during the transcription process cannot be ruled out, it is impossible to deny completely the academic value of the *Sōnggyo yoji*, whose purported author was Yi Pyök. Despite the possible spuriousness of both the *Manch'ŏn yugo* and the *Sōnggyo yoji*, the present study follows earlier research that sees Yi Pyök as the author of the latter work. This is because the *Sōnggyo yoji* reflects the position of Confucians who sought to embrace the Christian worldview without relinquishing the key values of Confucianism.

- 20 未生民來，前有上帝，唯一眞神
- 21 昭事上帝之學，久已陵吏。
- 22 *Yōyudang chōnsō* 與猶堂全書 [Complete works of *Yōyudang Chōng Yagyong*], ser. 1, *Nogam Kwŏn Ch'ōlsin myojimyōng* 鹿菴權哲身墓誌銘 [Epitaph of Nogam Kwŏn Ch'ōlsin], 33a.
- 23 Their discussions on the *Zhongyong* were later compiled by Chōng Yagyong as the *Chungyong kangūibo*. Kūm Changt'ae evaluates that, by embracing the worldview of Western learning through Yi Pyök in the process of interpreting the *Zhongyong*, Chōng Yagyong was able to escape from Zhu Xi's solid system for interpreting the *Zhongyong* and Neo-Confucianism's firm authority and to secure a perspective for a unique interpretation of the classics (Kūm 2002, 5).
- 24 此以下曠菴之文
- 25 *Yōyudang chōnsō*, ser. 2, *Chungyong kangūibo*, fasc. 1:64a.
- 26 *Yōyudang chōnsō*, ser. 2, *Chungyong kangūibo*, fasc. 1:64a.
- 27 *Yōyudang chōnsō*, ser. 2, *Chungyong kangūibo*, fasc. 1:33a.
- 28 *Yōyudang chōnsō*, ser. 2, *Chungyong kangūibo*, fasc. 1:22a.
- 29 *Yōyudang chōnsō*, ser. 1, *Pyōnbangsa tongbusūngjiso* (辨謗辭同副承旨疏), 43b.
- 30 *Yōyudang chōnsō*, ser. 2, *Chungyong kangūibo*.
- 31 *Yōyudang chōnsō*, ser. 2, *Maengja yoūi*, fasc. 2:38b.
- 32 *Yōyudang chōnsō*, ser. 2, *Ch'unch'u kojing*, fasc. 4:24a.
- 33 論天主始制天地萬物而主宰安養之
- 34 *Yōyudang chōnsō*, ser. 2, *Chungyong chajam*, fasc. 1:5a.
- 35 *Yōyudang chōnsō*, ser. 2, *Chungyong kangūibo*, fasc. 1:22b.
- 36 *Yōyudang chōnsō*, ser. 2, *Chungyong kangūibo*, fasc. 1:23a.
- 37 *Yōyudang chōnsō*, ser. 2, *Chungyong chajam*, fasc. 1:3a.
- 38 *Yōyudang chōnsō*, ser. 2, *Chungyong kangūibo*, fasc. 1:60b.

References

- Ames, Roger T. 2003. "Li [禮] and the A-theistic Religiousness of Classical Confucianism." In *Confucian Spirituality*, vol. 1, edited by Tu Wei-Ming and Mary Evelyn Tucker, 165–182. New York: Crossroad Publishing.
- . 2004. "A Response to Critics." *Dao* 3(2): 281–298.
- Ames, Roger T., and David L. Hall. 2001. *Focusing the Familiar: A Translation and Philosophical Interpretation of the Zhongyong*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.
- Baker, Donald. 1997. *Chosŏn hugi Yugyo wa Chŏnjugyo ūi taerip* [Confucian-Catholic confrontation in the late Chosŏn]. Translated by Kim Seyun. Seoul: Ilchogak.
- Boone, William J. 1848. *An Essay on the Proper Rendering of the Words Elohim and Theos into the Chinese Language*. Canton: Chinese Repository.
- Chŏng Yagyong 丁若鏞. n.d. *Yŏyudang chŏnsŏ* 與猶堂全書 [Complete works of Yŏyudang Chŏng Yagyong], ser. 1, *Nogam Kwŏn Ch'ŏlsin myojimyŏng* 鹿菴權哲身墓誌銘 [Epitaph of Nogam Kwŏn Ch'ŏlsin], 33a.
- . n.d. *Yŏyudang chŏnsŏ*, ser. 1, *Pyŏnbangsa tongbusŭngji-so* 辨謗辭同副承旨疏 [Appeal for defending rumours and declining tongbusŭngji], 43b.
- . n.d. *Yŏyudang chŏnsŏ*, ser. 1, *Sŏnjung ssi myojimyŏng* 先仲氏墓誌銘 [Epitaph of elder brother], 42a.
- . n.d. *Yŏyudang chŏnsŏ*, ser. 2, *Ch'unch'u kojŏng* 春秋考徵 [Evidential Inquiry into the Spring and Autumn Annals], fasc. 4:24a.
- . n.d. *Yŏyudang chŏnsŏ*, ser. 2, *Chungyong kangŭibo* 中庸講義補 [Supplement to the discussion of the Zhongyong], fasc. 1:22a, 1:22b, 1:23a, 1:33a, 1:4a, 1:60b, 1:64a.
- . n.d. *Yŏyudang chŏnsŏ*, ser. 2, *Chungyong chajam* 中庸自箴 [Moral lessons drawn from the Zhongyong], fasc. 1:16c, 1:3a, 1:4a, and 1:5a.
- . n.d. *Yŏyudang chŏnsŏ*, ser. 2, *Maengja yoŭi* 孟子要義 [Essential meanings of the Mencius], fasc. 2:38b.
- Girardot, N.J. 2002. *The Victorian Translation of China: James Legge's Oriental Pilgrimage*. Oakland: University of California Press.
- Hall, David L., and Roger T. Ames. 1987. *Thinking through Confucius*. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Jensen, Lionel M. 1997. *Manufacturing Confucianism: Chinese Traditions and Universal Civilization*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Kim Okhŭi 金玉姬. 1979. *Kwangam Yi Pyŏk ūi sŏhak sasang* 曠庵李藥畝 西學思想 [Kwangam Yi Pyŏk's western thinking]. Seoul: Kat'ollik ch'ulp'ansa.

- Kūm Changt'ae 琴章泰. 2002. "Zhongyong ūi ch'eje wa to ūi kibon kucho" 中庸의 體制와 道の 基本構造 [System of the Zhongyong and the basic structure of Dao]. *Tonga munhwa* 40: 3–43.
- Legge, James. 1852. *The Notions of the Chinese Concerning God and Spirits: with An Examination of the Defense of an Essay*. Hongkong: Hongkong Register Office.
- . 1877. *Confucianism in Relation to Christianity*. London: Trübner.
- . 1888. *The Nestorian Monument of Hsi-an Fu in Shen-hsi, China*. London: Trübner.
- . 1960. *The Chinese Classics: With a Translation, Critical and Exegetical Notes, Prolegomena, and Copious Indexes*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press.
- Medhurst, Walter Henry. 1847. *An Inquiry into the Proper Mode of Rendering the Word God in Translating the Sacred Scriptures into the Chinese Language*. Shanghai: Mission Press.
- Minamiki, George. 1985. *The Chinese Rites Controversy: From its Beginning to Modern Times*. Chicago: Loyola University Press.
- Mungello, David E. 1985. *Curious Land: Jesuit Accommodation and the Origins of Sinology*. Stuttgart: Franz Steiner.
- . 1994. *The Chinese Rites Controversy: Its History and Meaning*. Nettetal: Steyler Verlag.
- Paden, William E. 1988. *Religious Worlds: The Comparative Study of Religion*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Ricci, Matteo, S.J. 1985. *The True Meaning of the Lord of Heaven*. Translated by Douglas Lancashire and Peter Hu Kuo-chen. St. Louis: Institute of Jesuit Resources.
- . n.d. *Tianzhu shiyi* 天主實義 [True Meaning of the Lord of Heaven], fasc. 2, 4, and 8.
- Rosemont, Henry, and Roger T. Ames. 2009. *The Chinese Classic of Family Reverence: A Philosophical Translation of the Xiaojing*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press.
- Smith, Wilfred Cantwell. 1978. *The Meaning and End of Religion*. London: Harper & Row.
- Tu, Wei-Ming. 1989. *Centrality and Commonality: An Essay on Confucian Religiousness*. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Wang, Hui. 2008. *Translating Chinese Classics in a Colonial Context: James Legge and His Two Versions of the 'Zhongyong'*. Bern: Peter Lang.
- Wen, Haiming. 2004. "From Substance Language to Vocabularies of Process and Change: Translations of Key Philosophical Terms in the *Zhongyong*." *Dao* 3(2): 217–233.

- Yi Hwang 李滉. 1843. *T'oegye chip* 退溪集 [Complete works to T'oegye Yi Hwang]. *Tap Yi Tal Yi Ch'ōngi* 答李達李天機 [Answers to Yi Tal Yi Ch'ōngi], fasc. 13:17a.
- Yi Pyōk 李蘖. n.d. *Ch'ōnju konggyōngga* 天主恭敬歌 [An ode to reverent Lord of Heaven]. In Yi Sūnghun et al., *Manch'ōn yugo* 蔓川遺稿 [Surviving writings of Manch'ōn Yi Sūnghun].
- . 1986. *Sōnggyo yoji* 聖教要旨 [Essentials of the holy teaching]. Translated by Ha Sōngnae 河聲來. Seoul: Sōng Hwang Sōk-tu Ruga sowōn.
- Yi Sōngbae 李成培. 1979. *Yugyo wa kidokkyo—Yi Pyōk ūi han'gukchōk sinhak wōlli* 儒教와 基督教—李蘖의 韓國的神學原理 [Confucianism and Christianity: Yi Pyōk's Korean-style theological principles]. Seoul: St. Benedict Publishing Co.
- Yun Hyu 尹鑰. 1974 [1927]. *Purok* 附錄 [Appendix], *Haengjang* 行狀 [Biographical records], fasc. 1. In *Paekho chōnsō* 白湖全書 [Complete works of Paekho Yun Hyu]. 3 vols. Taegu: Paekho sōnsaeng munjip kanhaenghoe.
- . 1974a [1927]. *Chapjō* 雜著 [Miscellaneous writings], *Tosōl* 圖說 [Essays on diagrams], *Chungyong chi to* 中庸之圖 [Diagram of the *Zhongyong*], fasc. 35. In *Paekho chōnsō* 白湖全書.
- . 1974b [1927]. *Chapjō* 雜著, *Toksōgi: Chungyong* 讀書記—中庸 [Records on reading the *Zhongyong*], ch. 1, 3, and 10, fasc. 36. In *Paekho chōnsō* 白湖全書.
- . 1974c [1927]. *Chapjō* 雜著, *Toksōgi: Chungyong* 讀書記—中庸 [Records on reading the *Zhongyong*], *Chungyong Chuja changgu porok* 中庸朱子章句補錄 [Appendix to Master Zhu's first chapter of the *Zhongyong*], fasc. 36. In *Paekho chōnsō* 白湖全書.
- Yun Min'gu 尹敏求. 2014. *Chogi han'guk ch'ōnju kyohoesa ūi chaengjōm yōn'gu* 初期韓國 天主教會史의 爭點 研究 [Study of the points of contention in the early history of the Roman Catholic Church in Korea]. Seoul: Kukhak charyowōn.